SINISTER ROUGE 2

MATURE READERS
"One should be free to determine the course of one's gendered life..."
-Judith Butler
M·O PRODUCTIONS
ART+WORDS BY MORGAN BLACK

"SINISTER": (LAT., ON THE LEFT HAND).
DENOTING NON-CONFORMITY, DEVIATION FROM THE NORM.

"ROUGE" (FR., RED)
THE COLOUR OF SOCIALIST POLITICS.

MORGAN BLACK (THEY/THEM) IS A GENDER NON-CONFORMING ARTIST, SPECIALISING IN ILLUSTRATION, PERFORMANCE AND VIDEO WORK, ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY DEVOTED TO ISSUES OF GENDERED REPRESENTATION, ANDROGYNY, AND THE SOCIO-CULTURAL DISCOURSE OF SEXUAL AMBIGUITY.

THEY ARE A MEMBER OF THE QUEER DOT, A DUNDEE-BASED ART COLLECTIVE AIMED AT AMPLIFYING QUEER VOICES.

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M:C PRODUCTIONS

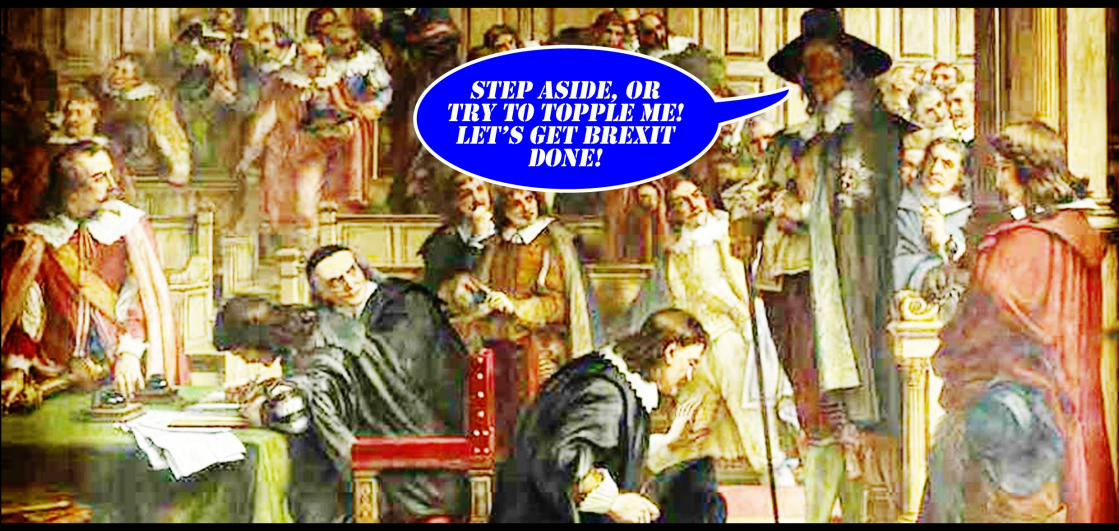
A month and a half after I splattered some pink paint on an old sheet, and we hung out in Trafalgar Square to shout at the self-elected Tory government, Sinister Rouge had five members (not including me and Kaz) and had made a net profit of £13.78 on our initial investment in T-shirt and mug printing. It was time to start immortalising our work...

"KAZ + FRA" ~ A 'TOON by FRANKIE
SO NOW WE HAVE SOME MEMBERS, WE CAN HAVE OUR FIRST EVER 'SINISTER ROUGE' MEETING!
THAT'S SO COOL, KAZ! WE'RE A REAL, ACTUAL THING!
LUV
WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT HOW FAR WE WOULD COME IN 6 WEEKS??
IKR!! ISN'T IT FAB!!
IF YOU WANT TO HELP MAKE A DIFFERENCE— TO RECOGNISE NON-BINARY + TRANS RIGHTS— GET RID OF THE TORY ELITE + MAKE BRITAIN A COUNTRY THAT CARES AGAIN— THEN JOIN US!
LUV

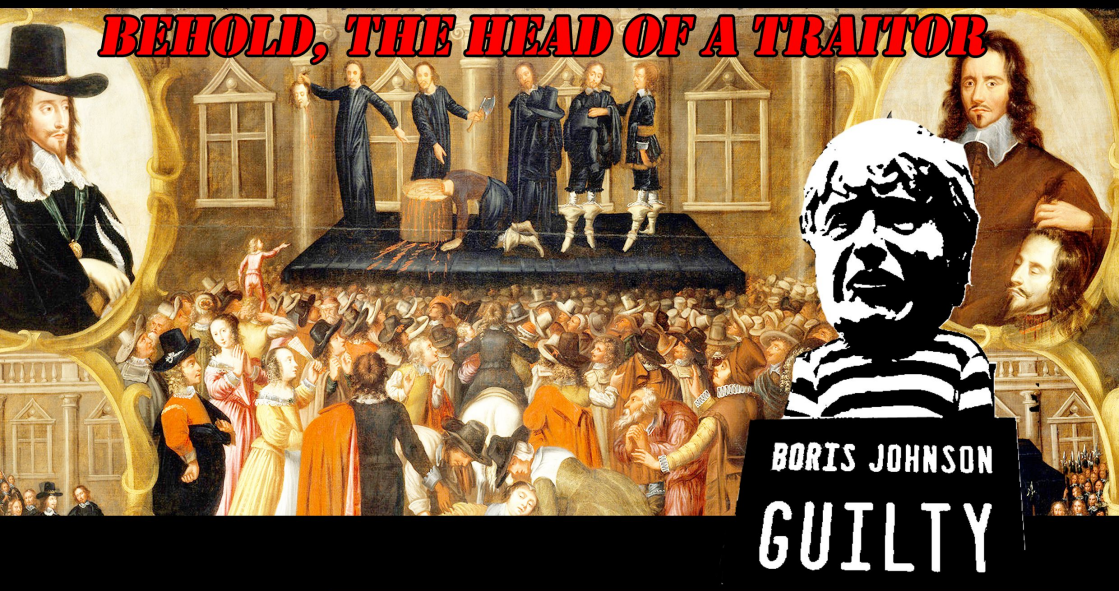
But events in the world, and our country in particular, were moving at a terrifying speed. Suddenly it seemed as if hate and division were everywhere, even being actively encouraged, and the need for a group like ours was greater than ever. It was rapidly becoming a case of "Them" vs "Everyone else"...which is usually how most revolutions begin.

CHAPTER 1

"ALL FANTASTIC IMAGES"



Somewhere in the back of my head, there kicked around an old history lesson about 'five members' of the old English parliament who helped to bring down the autocratic reign of Charles I, after the King failed to arrest them for disobeying his will. It's probably my stereotypical autistic patternism that insisted on seeing a connection there somewhere...



350 years ago, we cut the head off a traitor who tried to over-rule parliament, and damn near destroyed the country in the process. From the ashes of that blaze arose the current British constitutional monarchy.

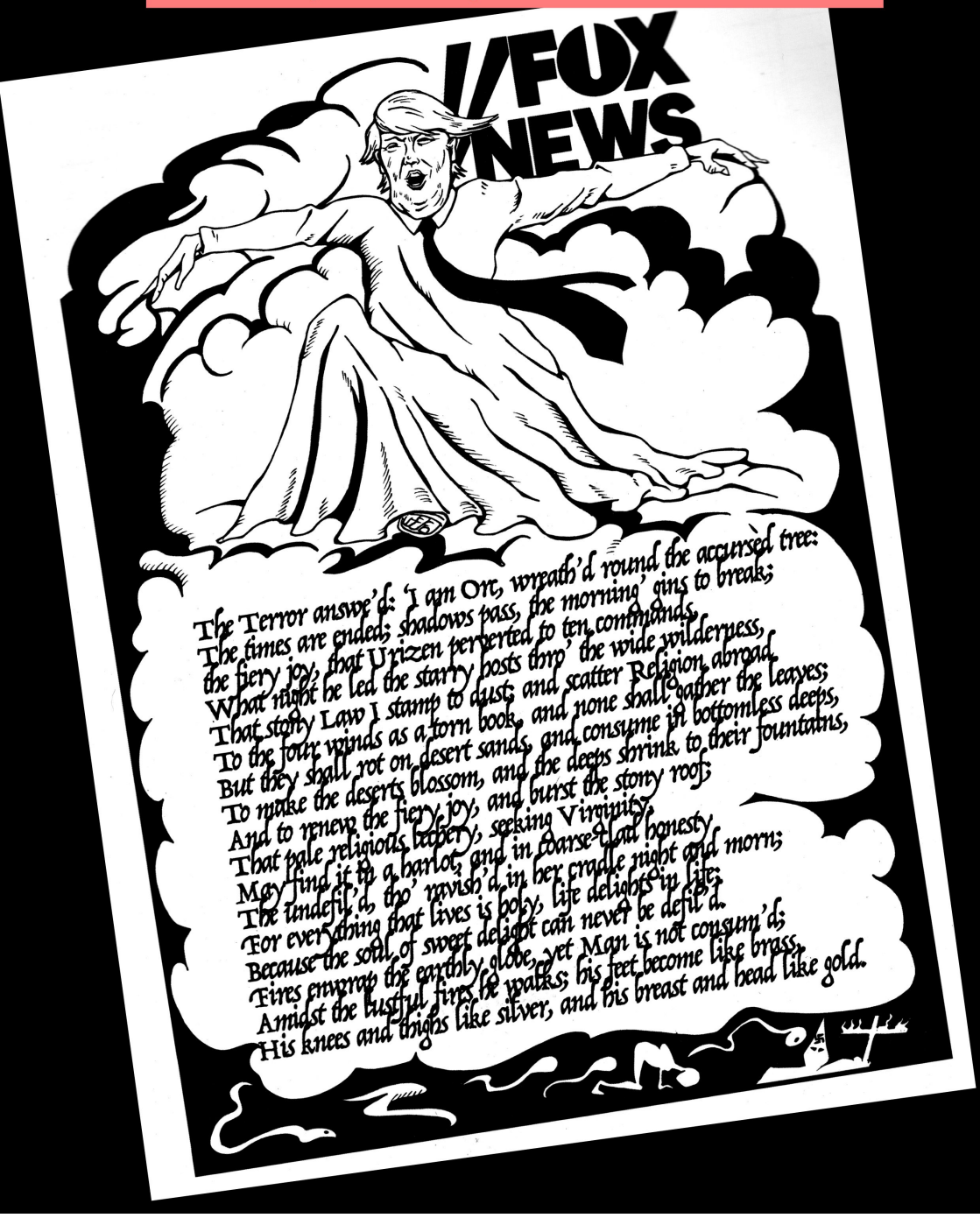
Do I really have to spell this out..?

It's not just in Britain where I see parallels. Reading Kaz's old books on William Blake made me realise just what America could have been had it lived up to his expectations...great. Truly great. His vision, his prophecy, was of a true 'promised land', where all people, all races, would be free and equal.

So cried he, rending off his robe and throwing down his sceptre
In sight of Albion's Guardian; and all the Thirteen Angels
Rent off their robes to the hungry wind, and threw their golden sceptres
Down on the land of America; indignant they descended
Head long from out their heav'nly heights, descending swift as fires
Over the land; naked and flaming are their lineaments seen
In the deep gloom; by Washington and Paine and Warren they stood;
And the flame folded, roaring fierce within the pitchy night,
Before the Demon red, who burnt towards America,
In black smoke, thunders, and loud winds, rejoicing in its terror,
Breaking in smoky wreaths from the wild deep, and gath'ring thick
In flames as of a furnace on the land from North to Deep South.

Great idea. Pity it never happened.

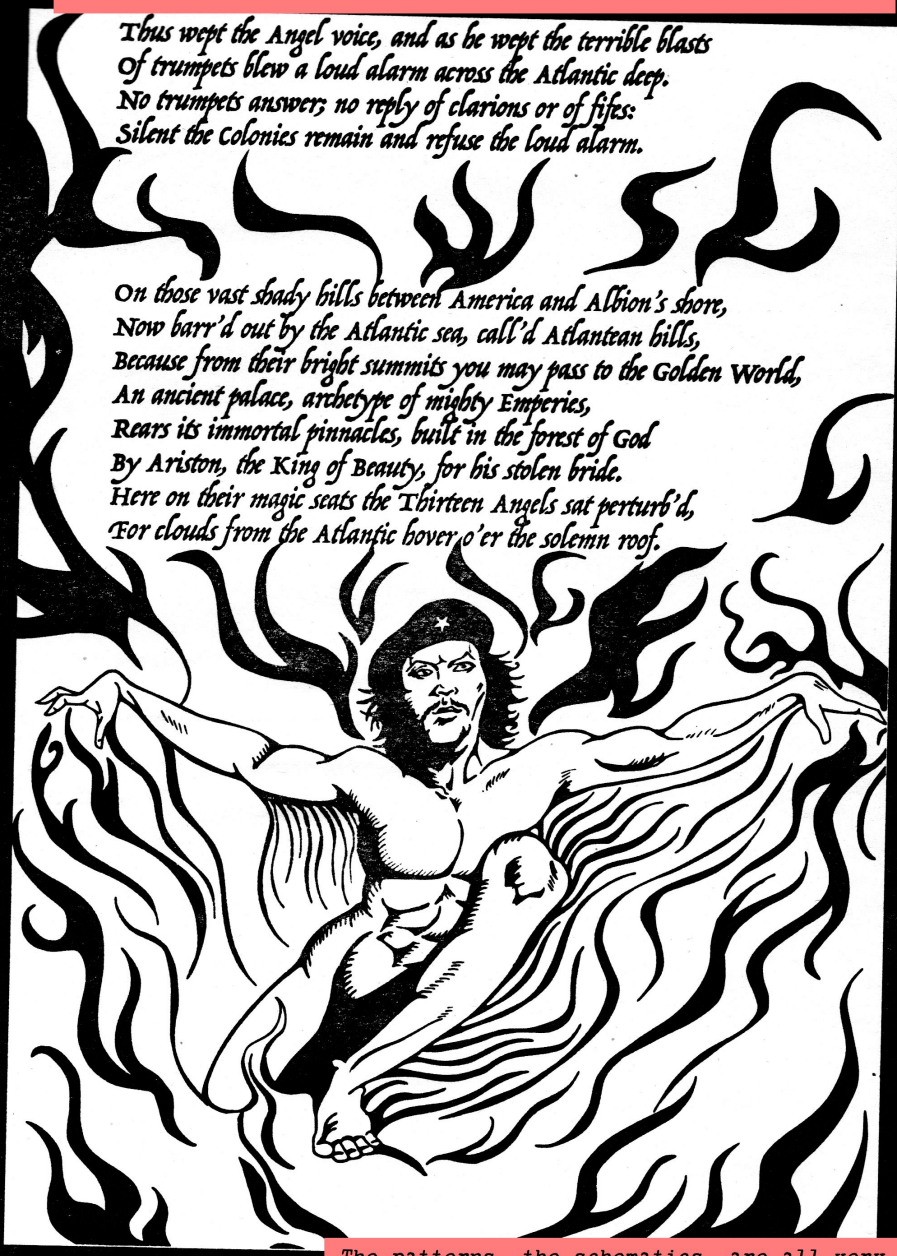
And the more I see of this moron spewing venom and lies on all the propaganda channels, the more I realise Chomsky is right: leaders are a distraction. It's a brilliant piece of subterfuge on behalf of the ruling parties in the English-speaking powers: set up a scarecrow to foster outrage among the population, while the backroom boys get to work on demolishing all the sacred cows of liberty and community.


/FOX NEWS
The Terror answer'd: 'I am Orc, wreath'd round the accursed tree:
The times are ended; shadows pass, the morning gins to break;
the fiery joy, that Urizen perverted to ten commands,
What right he led the starry hosts thro' the wide wilderness,
That starry Law I stamp to dust; and scatter Religion abroad,
To the four winds as a torn book, and none shall gather the leaves;
But they shall rot on desert sands, and consume in bottomless deeps,
To make the deserts blossom, and the deeps shrink to their fountains,
And to renew the fiery joy, and burst the stony roof;
That pale religious lechery, seeking Virginity,
May find it in a harlot, and in coarse-clad honesty,
The tindefil'd, tho' ravish'd, in her cradle night and morn;
For everything that lives is holy, life delights in life;
Because the soul of sweet delight can never be defil'd.
Fires enwrap the earthly globe, yet Man is not consum'd;
Amidst the lustful fires he walks; his feet become like brass,
His knees and thighs like silver, and his breast and head like gold.

But all is not lost...the spirit of Revolution is strong, and is rising. The fires of change will not be quenched. I can only fantasize about the day when Sinister Rouge has a million members and can speak and act on behalf of those who cannot.

Thus wept the Angel voice, and as he wept the terrible blasts
Of trumpets blew a loud alarm across the Atlantic deep.
No trumpets answer; no reply of clarions or of fifes:
Silent the Colonies remain and refuse the loud alarm.

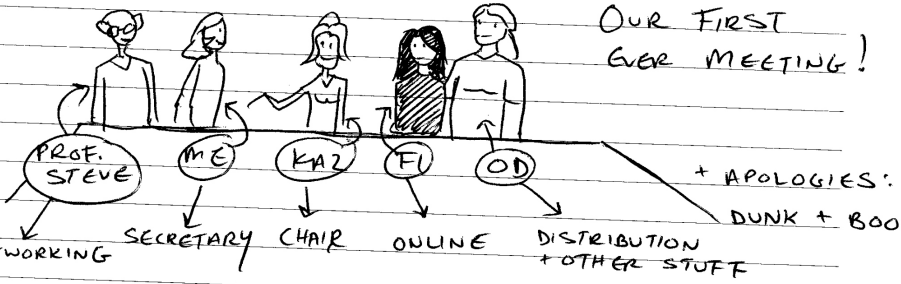
On those vast shady hills between America and Albion's shore,
Now barr'd out by the Atlantic sea, call'd Atlantean hills,
Because from their bright summits you may pass to the Golden World,
An ancient palace, archetype of mighty Emperies,
Rears its immortal pinnacles, built in the forest of God
By Ariston, the King of Beauty, for his stolen bride.
Here on their magic seats the Thirteen Angels sat perturb'd,
For clouds from the Atlantic hover o'er the solemn roof.



The patterns, the schematics, are all very clear to me. Kaz once called me a prophet, though I'm probably mad and inspired in equal measure.

Our first ever meeting was a blast. Two hours in Kaz's kitchen, drinking coffee and swapping vegan recipes later, and we had a MANIFESTO. Suddenly I started to feel like Karl Marx. Putting stuff in writing and having other people agree on principles brought tears to my eyes... So many ideas, so many outlets, so much potential.

"KAZ + FRA" — A TOON by FRANKIE ♥ Ⓐ



OUR FIRST EVER MEETING!

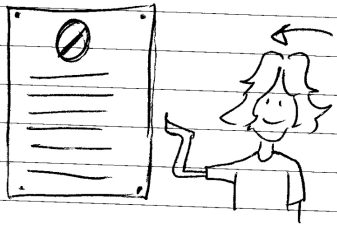
+ APOLOGIES: DUNK + BOO

HOLDS CHAIR OF SOCIOLOGY @ KAZ'S COLLEGE! TOP GUY

WE ESTABLISHED THE 'SINISTER ROUGE MANIFESTO'! BASICALLY, WE:

- FIGHT FASCISM WHEREVER WE SEE IT!
- ADVOCATE INTERSECTIONALITY + AMPLIFY ALL MINORITY VOICES SO WE BECOME A CONDUIT FOR OTHERS!
- NETWORK WITH OTHER GROUPS
- ESTABLISH A VISUAL PRESENCE, VIA OUR LOGO ETC, * BAMN *

+ OTHER STUFF TO BE FINALISED NEXT TIME (VEGAN COOKIES!)

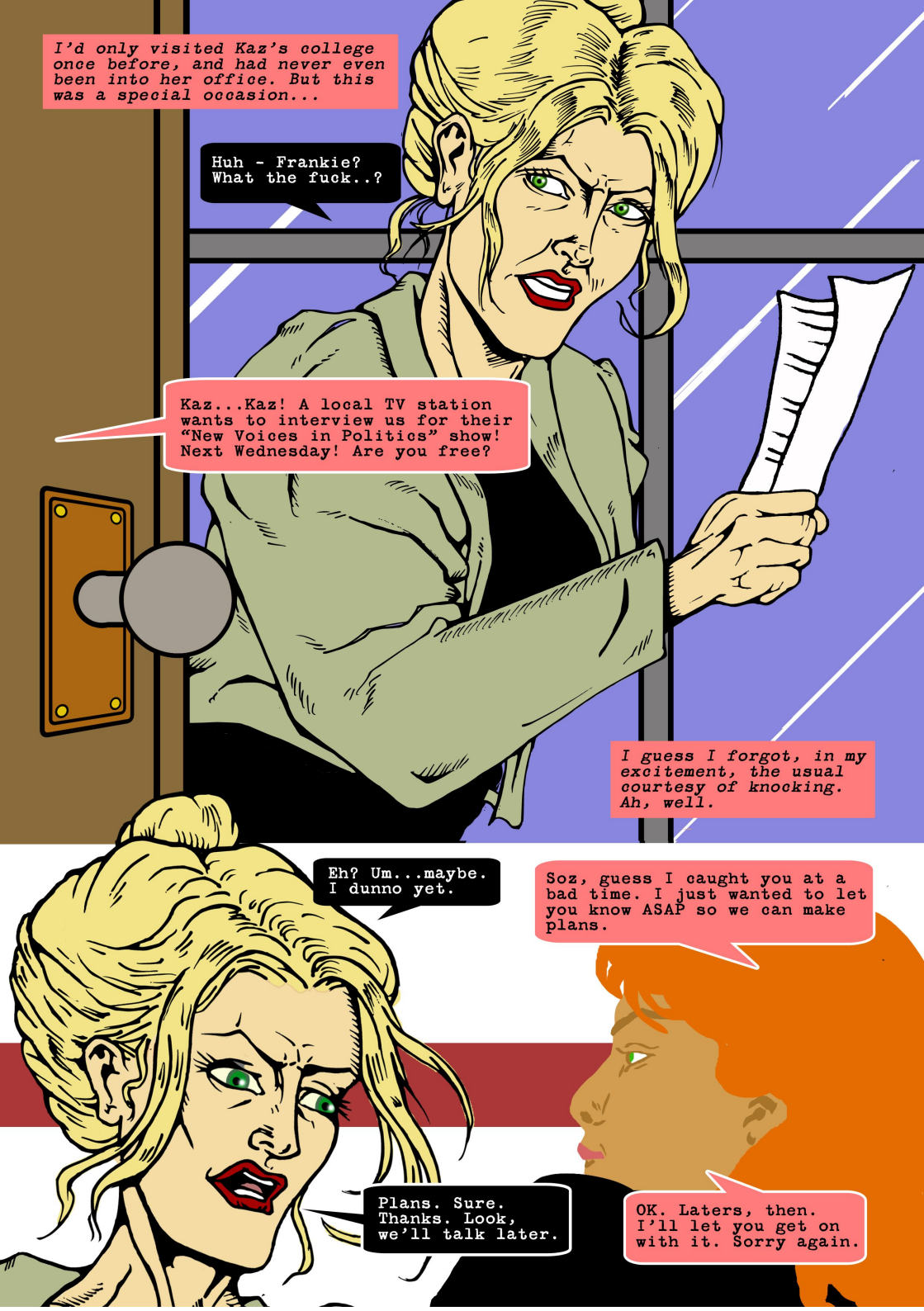


OUR MANIFESTO IS PINNED UP ON OUR WALL — + KAZ HAS CIRCULATED IT AROUND THE COLLEGE TO PROVE WE'RE 100% SERIOUS!

X X X

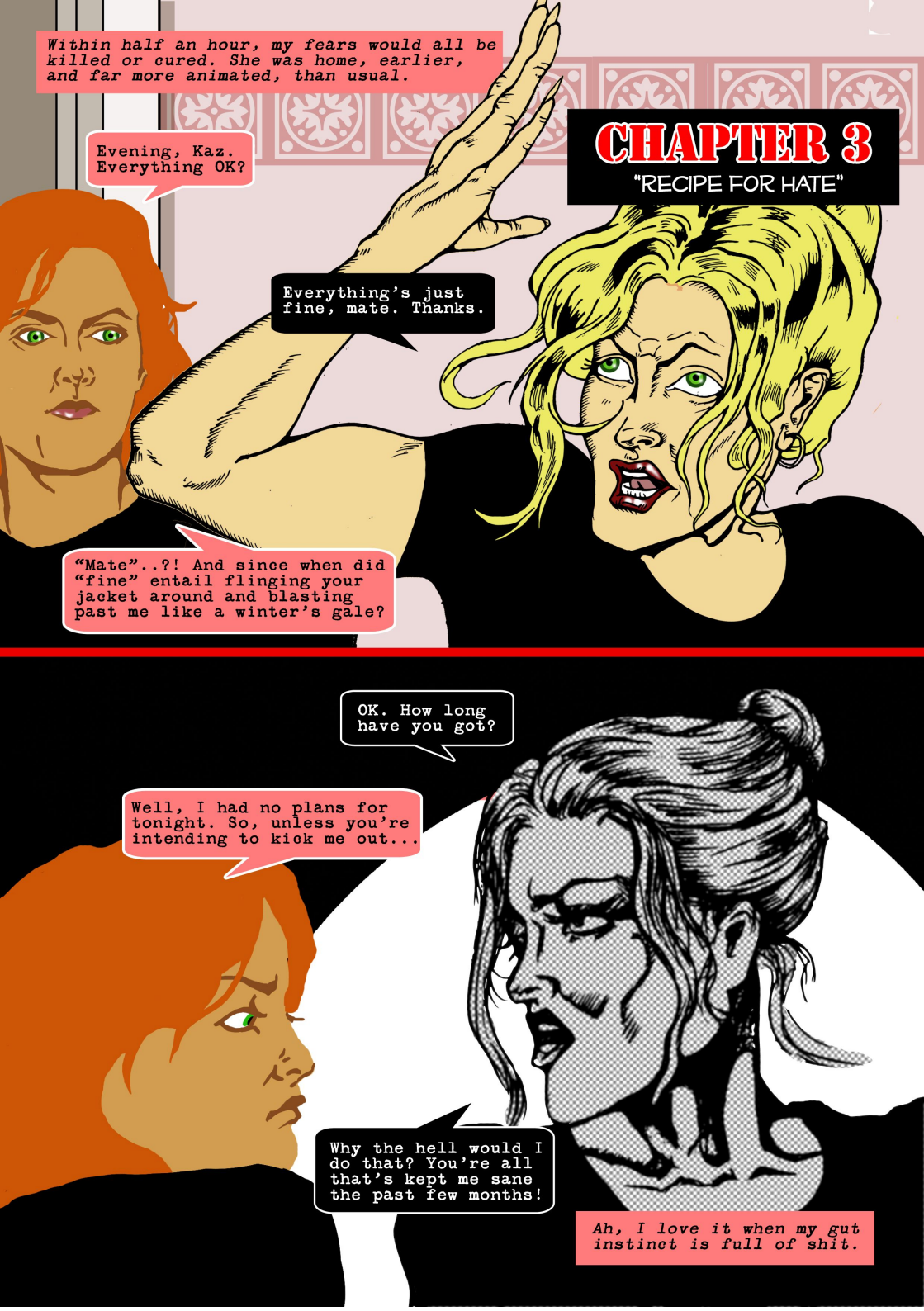
So as the secretary, my task is to write down the minutes, email them to people and do all the admin. Which, as I've still not been able to find a paying job, gives me plenty to do while Kaz is earning. Although I prefer to record the details in cartoon form, rather than boring bullet points...

And so, with political tensions hotting up and divisions across the world broadening, I decided to do something truly radical. While Kaz was out, I took myself down to Hyde Park to spread the word to any who would care to listen.
It was the first step in putting our official manifesto into action: being seen, networking, getting our message out there. By any means necessary.
CHAPTER 2
"INNER LOGIC"
Do you believe climate change is a threat? Do you think animal cruelty is disgusting no matter how rich or poor the people doing it? Do you believe that all people - everywhere - should have the same rights and freedoms..?
SINISTER ROUGE
come join us, if:
you believe in equality for ALL
you identify as queer, LGBT, NB
you are fucking SICK of this so-called government's LIES, BULLSHIT, propaganda and unchecked WAR against the masses!
FOR ACTION, NOT WORDS, IS
NOW!
I had to wait my turn but once I'd started, I just couldn't let up. And people actually listened. Some even whistled and cheered. Sure, I was no Greta Thunberg but I gave it everything I had. And then...

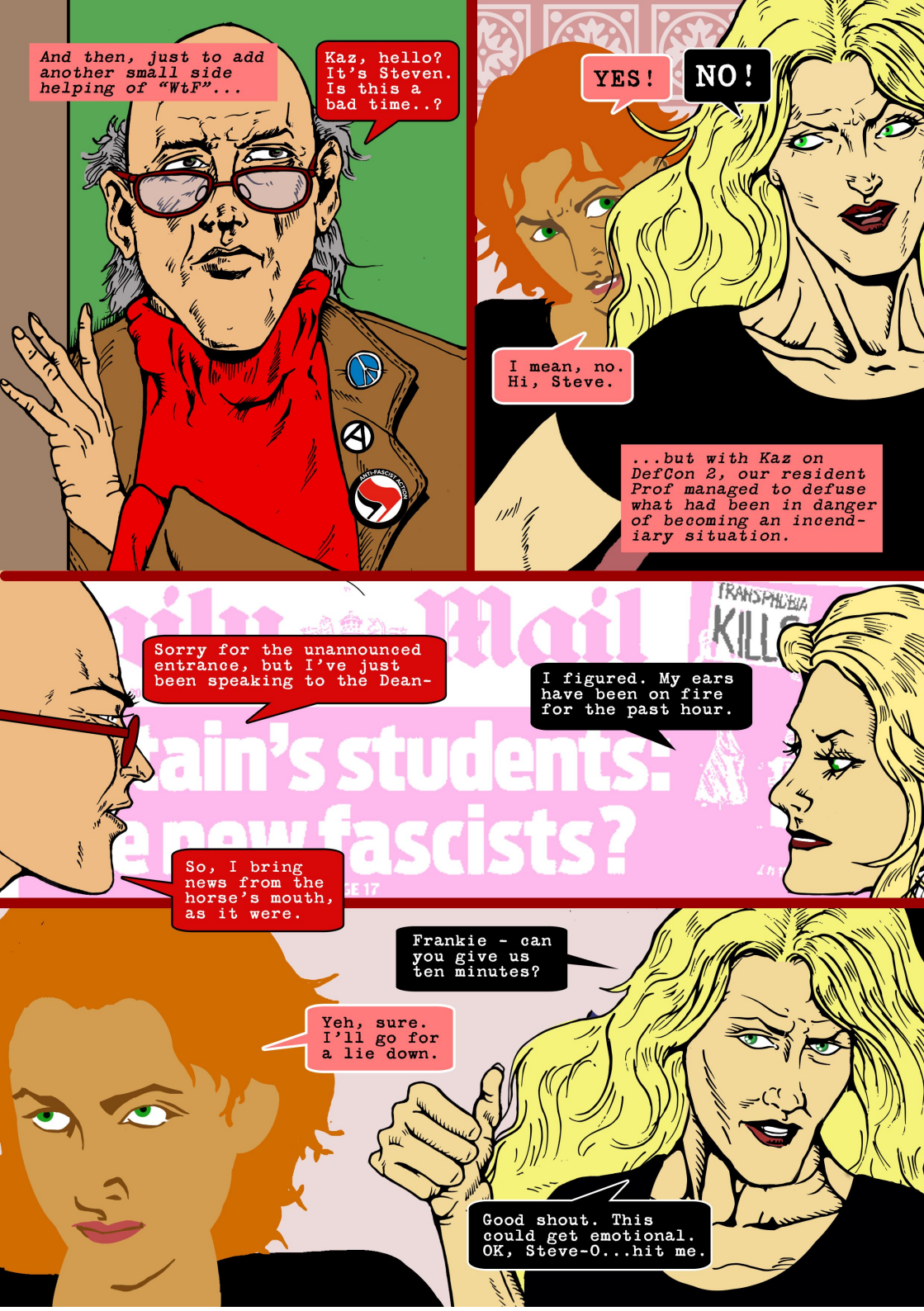

I'd only visited Kaz's college once before, and had never even been into her office. But this was a special occasion...
Huh - Frankie? What the fuck..?
Kaz...Kaz! A local TV station wants to interview us for their "New Voices in Politics" show! Next Wednesday! Are you free?
I guess I forgot, in my excitement, the usual courtesy of knocking. Ah, well.
Eh? Um...maybe. I dunno yet.
Soz, guess I caught you at a bad time. I just wanted to let you know ASAP so we can make plans.
Plans. Sure. Thanks. Look, we'll talk later.
OK. Laters, then. I'll let you get on with it. Sorry again.

Well, that was curiously depressing. And unsettling. Couldn't help thinking I'd walked into the middle of something really private. The promise to 'talk later' was fine, but that meant waiting.
And waiting for anything less positive than Christmas presents always tended to make mince out of my guts.
The trudge back to Kaz's flat was excruciating. So much for my revolutionary fervour. So much for being a radical leader of change for millions, when I couldn't even change the way my thoughts affected my own stupid hypersensitive body.
The cramps were coming, and it wasn't a bad period either. It was my usual overture to a real pissing downer...

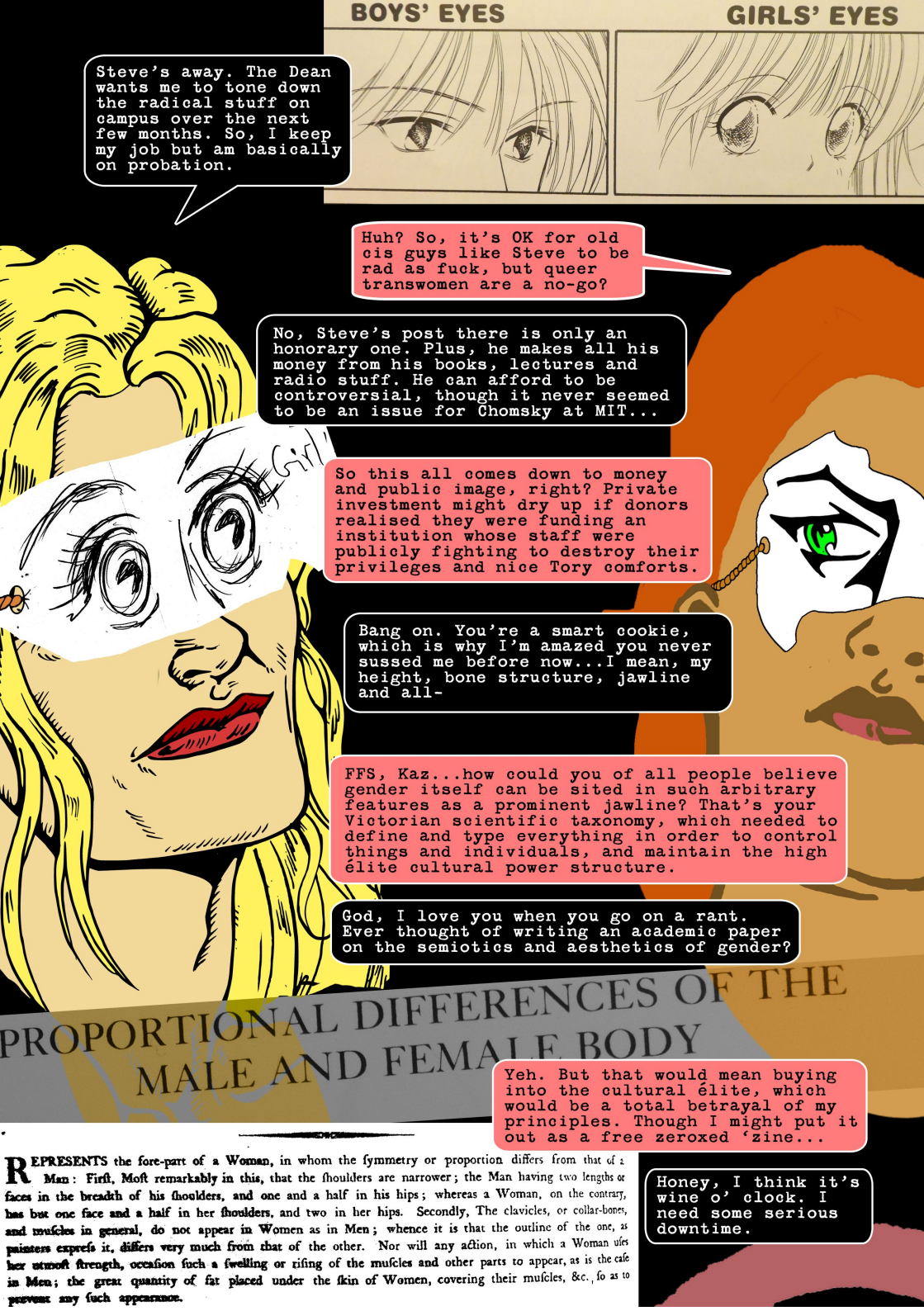
For the uninitiated: here's a game you can play next time you're bored shitless (hah!)...
WTAF?
See how long you can spend sitting on the loo, expecting to pass a cannonball. And have absolutely nothing happen by the end.
That's the usual story when I get myself stressed. Everything inside me just packs its bags and takes a vacation.
So whatever demon was eating Kaz, was now chewing on me too. And I'd already convinced myself that we were through - she'd found some issue with me, needed me out the flat, had met someone else, had too much hassle at work, or whatever.
Nothing that amazing, that true, that perfect, could have ever lasted. But at least I'd have some great memories.
...as well as some truly awesome inspiration to set me on the right path for the rest of my life. Assuming I was bold enough to take it, of course.

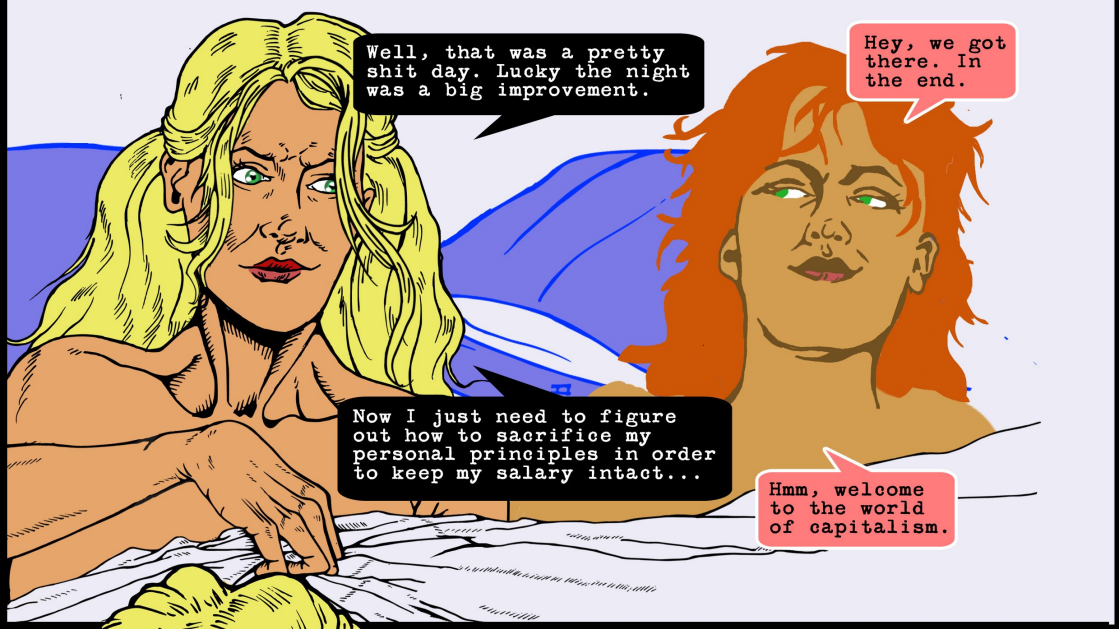

Within half an hour, my fears would all be killed or cured. She was home, earlier, and far more animated, than usual.
CHAPTER 3
"RECIPE FOR HATE"
Evening, Kaz. Everything OK?
Everything's just fine, mate. Thanks.
"Mate"..?! And since when did "fine" entail flinging your jacket around and blasting past me like a winter's gale?
OK. How long have you got?
Well, I had no plans for tonight. So, unless you're intending to kick me out...
Why the hell would I do that? You're all that's kept me sane the past few months!
Ah, I love it when my gut instinct is full of shit.

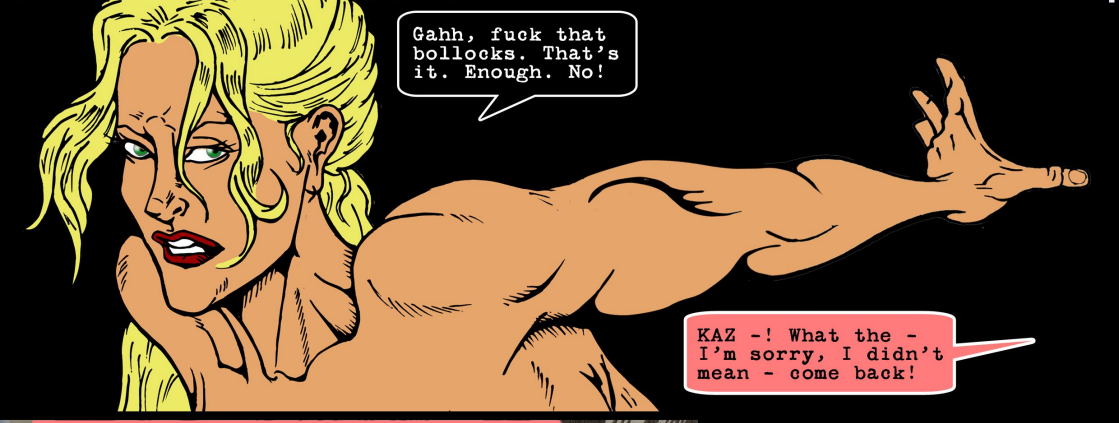
Well, there's a few rather unpleasant people at the college who have been trying to get me out of a job for a while now...and it looks like my recent radical activism is the final nail in that coffin.
What! But you're a libertarian, Kaz - not a fucking nazi! What kind of bullshit are these bastards spreading?
Like I said, there's other stuff. Internal stuff, curriculum stuff, union stuff, and the small matter of me being trans, which a couple of transphobes have decided is-
Whoah! Wait - you said you're trans, Kaz? Uh - really?
It hadn't meant to sound like it did. It was just a surprise - I mean, I would never have guessed, my anger at the whole bullshit scenario making my reaction sound so much worse.
Yes. Really. I hope it's not an issue for you too, Frankie.
Kaz shaking her hair down before bedtime was a frighteningly rare occurrence. I really hoped this wasn't the bit where she tore it off and showed me her Combat 18 and Chelsea Headhunters tattoos in a surreal reversal of everything I'd loved and believed in.
But my stupid nightmare flights of fancy were grounded by the very real venom now seeping from her tongue. I had accidentally upset the one person I had ever cared about, and had to make serious amends, fast...
Or else, I WILL be kicking you out. Right fucking now, and for good.
'Cos I really don't need any more toxic TERFy twats taking up space in my life, sweetheart.
...before she went full-on psycho on my unworthy ass.

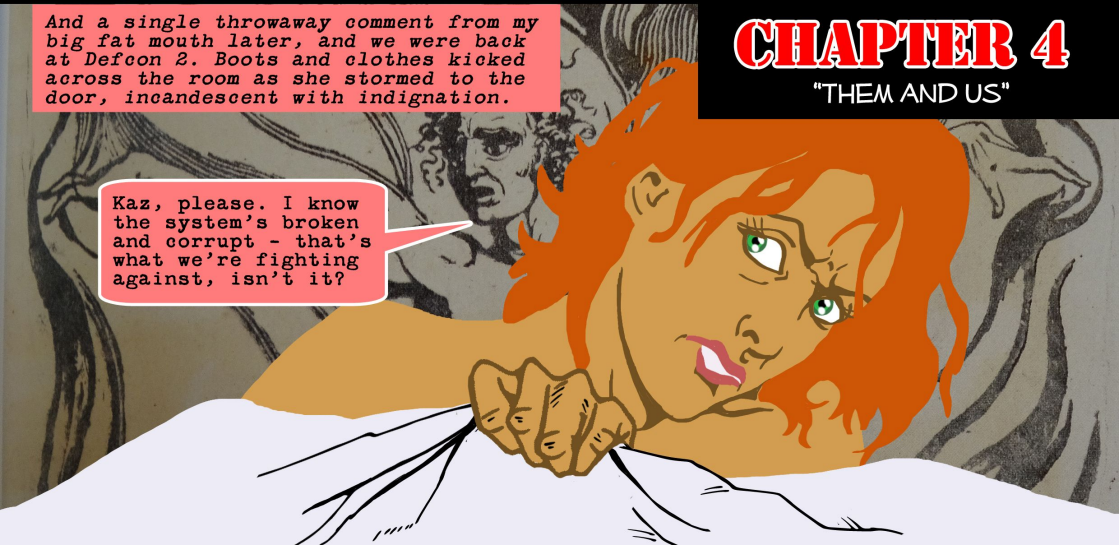

And then, just to add another small side helping of "WtF"...
Kaz, hello? It's Steven. Is this a bad time..?
YES!
NO!
I mean, no. Hi, Steve.
...but with Kaz on DefCon 2, our resident Prof managed to defuse what had been in danger of becoming an incendiary situation.
Sorry for the unannounced entrance, but I've just been speaking to the Dean-
I figured. My ears have been on fire for the past hour.
So, I bring news from the horse's mouth, as it were.
Frankie - can you give us ten minutes?
Yeh, sure. I'll go for a lie down.
Good shout. This could get emotional. OK, Steve-O...hit me.

She was the transcendence of everything fixed and material in my life, the kind of person who changes destinies.
I'd invested a lot in her, in 'us'. The group, my ideals, my future. Did I even worship her? Yeh, probably.
And now I knew she'd also had the courage to rebuild herself completely, a transhumanist, post-gender embodiment of all my half-assed theories and fumbled philosophies.
If I'd Frankenstein'd my own Tyler Durden, I couldn't have created a more perfect being.
RATHER BE A CYBORG THAN A GODDESS?


BOYS' EYES
GIRLS' EYES
Steve's away. The Dean wants me to tone down the radical stuff on campus over the next few months. So, I keep my job but am basically on probation.
Huh? So, it's OK for old cis guys like Steve to be rad as fuck, but queer transwomen are a no-go?
No, Steve's post there is only an honorary one. Plus, he makes all his money from his books, lectures and radio stuff. He can afford to be controversial, though it never seemed to be an issue for Chomsky at MIT...
So this all comes down to money and public image, right? Private investment might dry up if donors realised they were funding an institution whose staff were publicly fighting to destroy their privileges and nice Tory comforts.
Bang on. You're a smart cookie, which is why I'm amazed you never sussed me before now...I mean, my height, bone structure, jawline and all-
FFS, Kaz...how could you of all people believe gender itself can be sited in such arbitrary features as a prominent jawline? That's your Victorian scientific taxonomy, which needed to define and type everything in order to control things and individuals, and maintain the high élite cultural power structure.
God, I love you when you go on a rant. Ever thought of writing an academic paper on the semiotics and aesthetics of gender?
PROPORTIONAL DIFFERENCES OF THE MALE AND FEMALE BODY
REPRESENTS the fore-part of a Woman, in whom the ſymmetry or proportion differs from that of a Man: Firſt, Moſt remarkably in this, that the ſhoulders are narrower; the Man having two lengths or faces in the breadth of his ſhoulders, and one and a half in his hips; whereas a Woman, on the contrary, has but one face and a half in her ſhoulders, and two in her hips. Secondly, The clavicles, or collar-bones, and muſcles in general, do not appear in Women as in Men; whence it is that the outline of the one, as painters expreſs it, differs very much from that of the other. Nor will any action, in which a Woman uſes her utmoſt ſtrength, occaſion ſuch a ſwelling or riſing of the muſcles and other parts to appear, as is the caſe in Men; the great quantity of fat placed under the ſkin of Women, covering their muſcles, &c., ſo as to prevent any ſuch appearance.
Yeh. But that would mean buying into the cultural élite, which would be a total betrayal of my principles. Though I might put it out as a free zeroxed 'zine...
Honey, I think it's wine o' clock. I need some serious downtime.


Well, that was a pretty shit day. Lucky the night was a big improvement.
Hey, we got there. In the end.
Now I just need to figure out how to sacrifice my personal principles in order to keep my salary intact...
Hmm, welcome to the world of capitalism.


Gahh, fuck that bollocks. That's it. Enough. No!
KAZ -! What the - I'm sorry, I didn't mean - come back!


And a single throwaway comment from my big fat mouth later, and we were back at Defcon 2. Boots and clothes kicked across the room as she stormed to the door, incandescent with indignation.
CHAPTER 4
"THEM AND US"
Kaz, please. I know the system's broken and corrupt - that's what we're fighting against, isn't it?

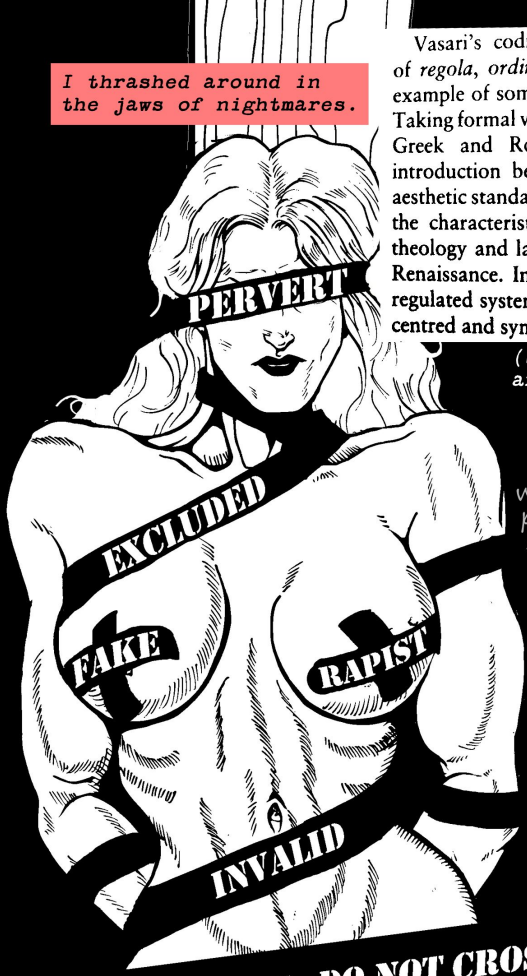
Two things, Frankie honey: 1) quit blaming yourself for everything that goes squiff in this FUBAR life of mine and 2) if you want out - I mean, seriously want out - then go now. Because from here on there's no safety net. I'm standing by my beliefs and my commitment to ground level activism, and will not be threatened or compromised by any so-called authority or power.
Which means I can't guarantee you anything other than all the affection this shredded heart of mine can give, and the shared hope that things can be better.
I've got letters to write and things to do. Sleep on it, eh?
(c) GRS NHS
And that was that. She was ready to give up everything - me, her home, her pension - for her ideals. If I hadn't been so dumbstruck I would have tried to talk her out of it. But people in the past had given up far more for the belief that they could make a difference.
Which of course sealed my commitment to her - to us. If we ended up sleeping together on friends' floors or boiling rainwater in a squat, then we'd still be together.
I tried to sleep, but I couldn't. My mind was on fire with the knowledge that the rest of my life had just begun.

And all night I found myself feverishly re-thinkning, and over-thinking, all the old lies, the propaganda, the negative discourse which had forced her - and me along with her - onto this desperate path.
Do trans people "surgically mutilate their own bodies" to conform to a gender role that is inexorably tied to physical body parts...? (Steinem, 1977)
Are transfemale bodies really predicated on "patriarchal myths" of "male mothering" and the "making of woman according to man's image"... (Raymond, 1979)?
What say you, Pygmalion?

I thrashed around in the jaws of nightmares.

Vasari's codification of Vitruvian categories, the famous list of *regola*, *ordine*, *misura*, *disegno* and *maniera* is an interesting example of some of the governing principles of the classical body. Taking formal values from a purified mythologized canon of Ancient Greek and Roman authors – the 'classic' with which this introduction began – the classical body was far more than an aesthetic standard or model. It structured, from the inside as it were, the characteristically 'high' discourses of philosophy, statecraft, theology and law, as well as literature, as they emerged from the Renaissance. In the classical discursive body were encoded those regulated systems which were closed, homogeneous, monumental, centred and symmetrical.

(Stallybrass & White, 'The Politics and Poetics of Transgression')



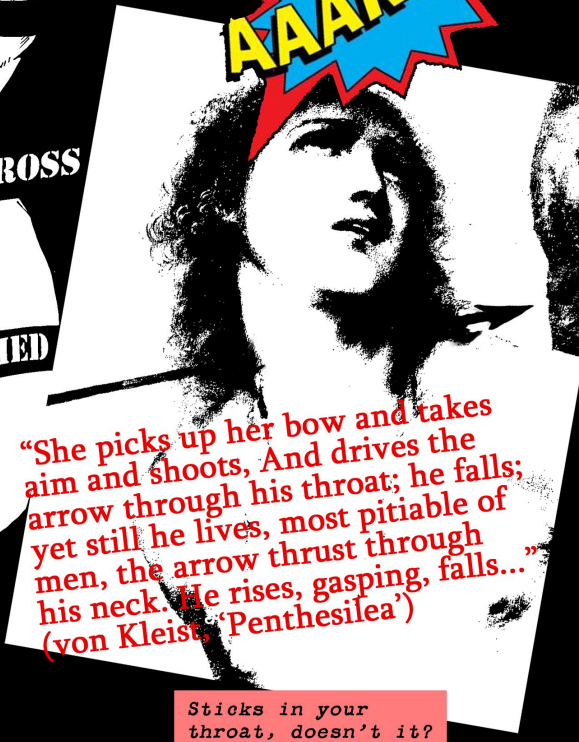
who are my kin in this odd world of promising monsters, vampires, surrogates, living tools and aliens?

what kinds of offspring count as illegitimate?

...but illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins... their fathers, after all, are inessential.
(Donna Haraway)

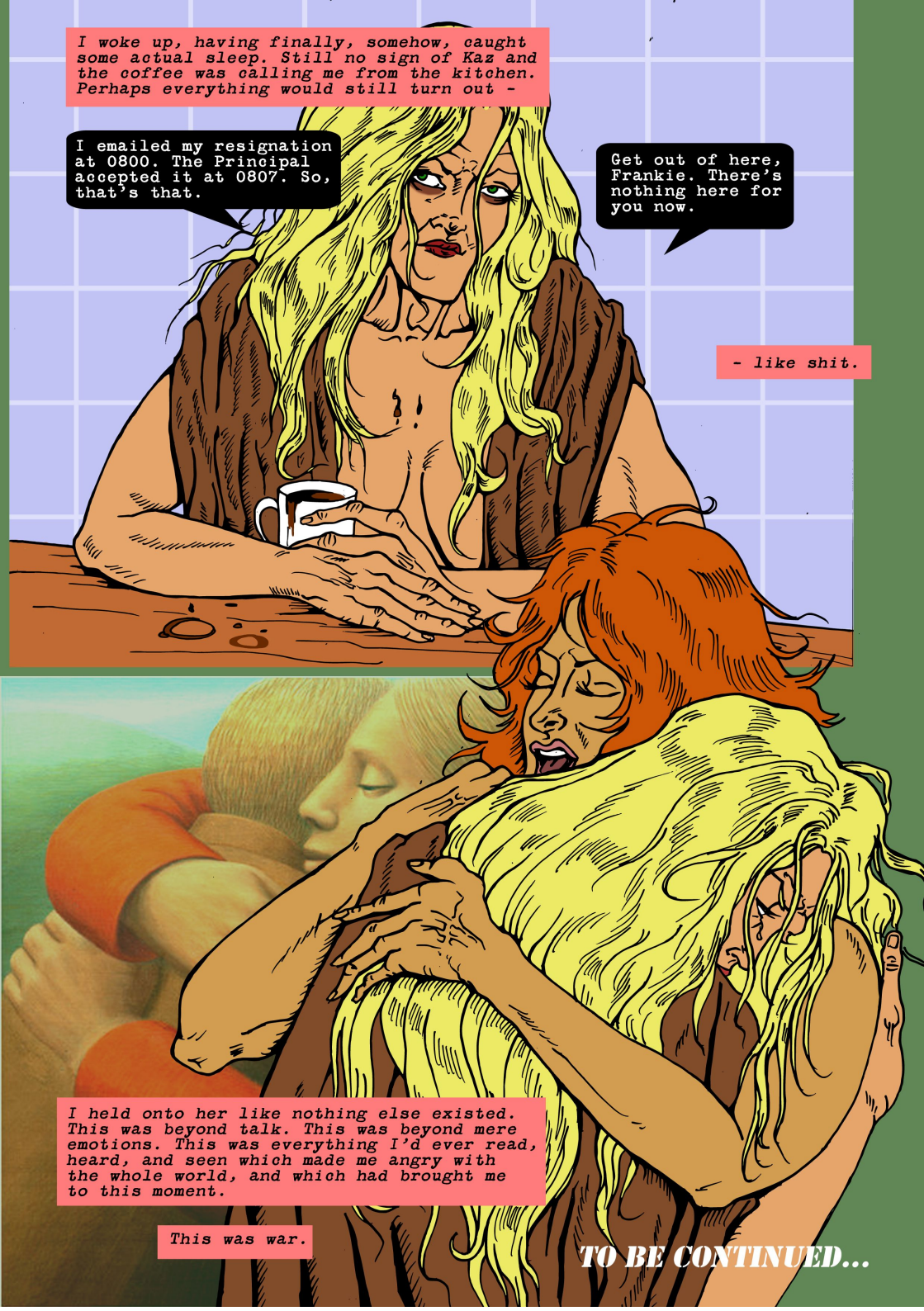
BODY POLICE LINE - DO NOT CROSS

AAARGH!



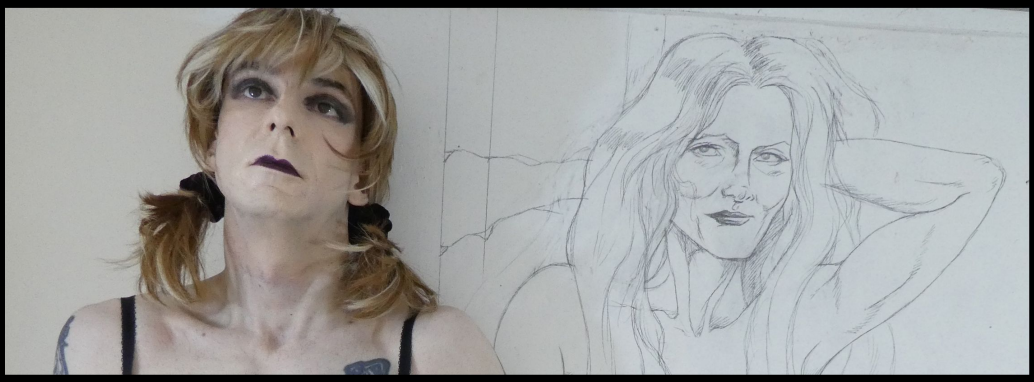
"She picks up her bow and takes aim and shoots, And drives the arrow through his throat; he falls; yet still he lives, most pitiable of men, the arrow thrust through his neck. He rises, gasping, falls..."
(von Kleist, 'Penthesilea')

Sticks in your throat, doesn't it?


I woke up, having finally, somehow, caught some actual sleep. Still no sign of Kaz and the coffee was calling me from the kitchen. Perhaps everything would still turn out -
I emailed my resignation at 0800. The Principal accepted it at 0807. So, that's that.
Get out of here, Frankie. There's nothing here for you now.
- like shit.
I held onto her like nothing else existed. This was beyond talk. This was beyond mere emotions. This was everything I'd ever read, heard, and seen which made me angry with the whole world, and which had brought me to this moment.
This was war.
TO BE CONTINUED...

TAKING IT ON THE CHIN:

On the creation of 'Sinister Rouge', and non-binary gendered representation



'Sinister Rouge' was directly informed by the artist's undergraduate dissertation research on the non-binary body in art history, society and culture, and is also the culmination of years of representing atypical feminine forms - representations which often met with confused or hostile responses from audiences thoroughly brainwashed by the Western heteronormative orthodoxy.

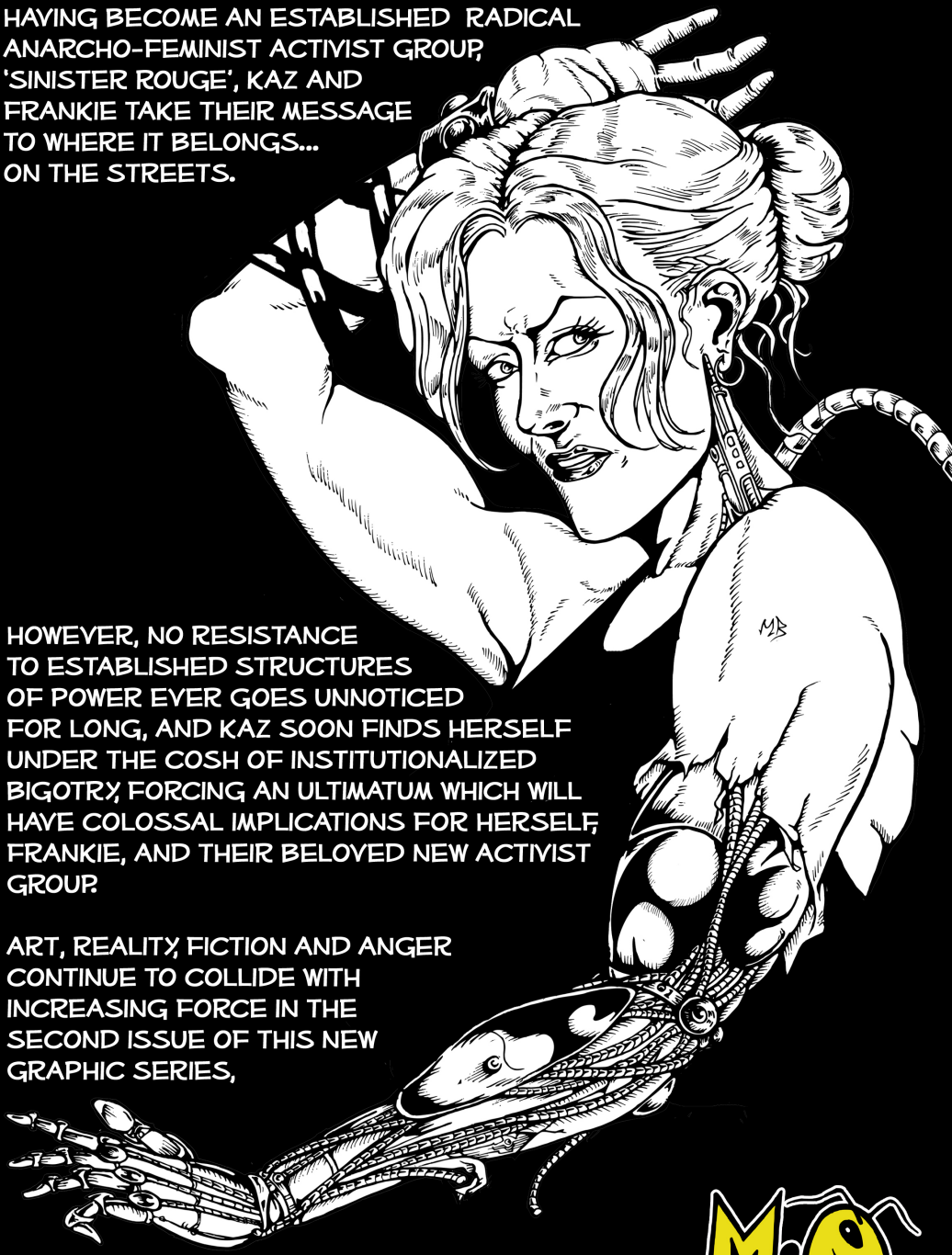
"All your women look like trannies" is a comment received years ago on their now-defunct Deviantart account, one of many helpful critical commentaries which queried the artist's decision to depict female characters with developed body musculature, aggressive postures and, most perniciously of all, "men's chins" - asserting that pure biological gender is, after all, cited primarily in some arbritary, Galton-esque physiognomical feature. The underlying insinuation was of course that a trans, or even cross-dressed, representation was completely undesirable or even reprehensible, that such ambiguity could not be tolerated - and that the artist must "learn how to draw women better" (i.e to conform to a male gaze seeking desirable and sexually compatible, non-troubling, representations).

Finally exasperated by years of this kind of narrow critique, in 2015 they set out to create a comic book series in which the female lead was, in fact, fully trans - a 6' 3" Russian ex-cop, with a jawline modelled after Sean Bean (or possibly, any number of cisgendered Pre-Raphaelite women). That series is presently on hold but it began the artist's kickback against the heteronormative aesthetic which still infests Western art, and comic books most obviously, in which no woman can look under 25 years old, have bodily proportions unlike a Barbie doll, or have a chin. For this reason, Kaz's 'coming out' was held off until half-way through this present second issue, with the intention of seeing how many readers 'read' her, or wondered how Frankie failed to.

In the post-Trump, post-Johnson political era, the trans and non-binary voice will be heard, and will be represented. This is not fascistic dogma but a simple acknowledgement of universal human rights. The artist's understanding of anarchism as a personal belief is not one of destruction and lawlessness, but of purely humanitarian and libertarian concern for others and the rights of equality and representation (for more info, see Chomsky on anarchism) - the erosion of which have their roots, of course, in the élite structures of power and control which inform everything from legal statutes to how a representation of a person with a chin does not fit the taxonomical label of 'woman' - or if it does, it is probably some degenerate, misfit abnormality for which Galton's eugenics theories were conceived.

(For further enlightenment on non-binary and queer physiognomy, the artist can recommend the works of contemporary photographer Asa Johannessen, whose theories heavily influenced the artist's dissertation and, consequently, this very book.)

HAVING BECOME AN ESTABLISHED RADICAL ANARCHO-FEMINIST ACTIVIST GROUP, 'SINISTER ROUGE', KAZ AND FRANKIE TAKE THEIR MESSAGE TO WHERE IT BELONGS... ON THE STREETS.



HOWEVER, NO RESISTANCE TO ESTABLISHED STRUCTURES OF POWER EVER GOES UNNOTICED FOR LONG, AND KAZ SOON FINDS HERSELF UNDER THE COSH OF INSTITUTIONALIZED BIGOTRY, FORCING AN ULTIMATUM WHICH WILL HAVE COLOSSAL IMPLICATIONS FOR HERSELF, FRANKIE, AND THEIR BELOVED NEW ACTIVIST GROUP.

ART, REALITY, FICTION AND ANGER CONTINUE TO COLLIDE WITH INCREASING FORCE IN THE SECOND ISSUE OF THIS NEW GRAPHIC SERIES,

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